



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
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Speaker of the House Thomas M. Finneran
ADDRESS TO THE CITIZENS OF THE COMMONWEALTH
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Before I begin my remarks, I would ask you to imagine with me the very real possibility that a baby girl will be born in some hospital in Massachusetts during the course of my comments here today. Perhaps her parents are experiencing the joys and hopes, the dreams and fears of first time parents. Many of you have experienced those same joys and hopes, those dreams and fears, that unconditional love and the awe that accompanies the gift and the miracle of life.

We do not know this little girl's name. Yet her presence in our minds is every bit as real as our presence in this chamber. For the next few minutes, I would ask you to keep her there in your mind.

In organizing my thoughts regarding the New Year, I have been particularly struck by three things:

First, that the frequency and severity of world events has for many months completely derailed the global and national economies; second, that the economic stress created in thousands of households across Massachusetts is palpable; third, that the State of California's perhaps unwitting and decidedly negative example presents itself as both instruction and opportunity.

These three circumstances remind us that the world can change very quickly and thereby disrupt the best laid plans of families, companies, and governments.

Notwithstanding the rapidity and rigor of these negative events, we should not be discouraged, for a fourth circumstance is also true:

We have been here before.

A quick rewind of the tape would show that the economic and fiscal circumstances of our state were incredibly difficult during the period from 1988 to 1992 and that our response to those difficult circumstances was neither as satisfactory nor as skillful as has been our response to this recession. In addition, a dearth of preparation and an excess of political posturing had put Massachusetts in perilous condition.

In short, the Massachusetts of then was the California of today.

Having lived through that multi-year crack up of the Commonwealth, many of us were determined to move Massachusetts in a different direction and to draw clear lessons from those dark and dreary days.

I will not strain your patience with a recitation of the many reforms and initiatives of the 1990's. It should suffice to remind people that at the beginning of the '90s, Massachusetts was widely seen as an economic, fiscal, and political disaster area, suffering from self-inflicted wounds as well as from policies which discouraged - even punished - responsible behaviors and productive activities. Back then, no one would have predicted that Massachusetts would, on its own initiative, move forward from the depths of its troubles to the very vanguard of the 50 states.

We in the legislature focused ourselves on five things: changing our attitudes and policies on business investment and job creation; responsibly cutting tax burdens and tax rates more than 40 times; demonstrating remarkable spending discipline, even as health care costs exploded all across the developed world; painstakingly building up a remarkable rainy day reserve account; and lastly, initiating multi-billion dollar state investments in K-12 education, which has put Massachusetts students at the head of the nation's classrooms, and in health insurance coverage for our children, which has made Massachusetts a role model for the country.

Those achievements were the real deal and those achievements are yours.

They are testaments to the possibilities which attach to strong political leadership and an undistracted focus on a few important objectives.

Today we are in a similar though better informed position than was our situation in the midst of the last recession. Similar possibilities and achievements lie ahead for Massachusetts, if the leadership of our state, executive as well as legislative, draws upon the lessons of the 1990s and brings those lessons to bear upon the following five goals:

Our foremost priority during the past year and in the years ahead must be the cultivation of ever greater economic development. In a word, it's all about jobs. Jobs, jobs, and more jobs.... Of every conceivable stripe and skill. Jobs and economic growth are the oxygen for everything else that we may hope to achieve. Even more important than that hoped for social progress however, is the dignity of thousands of individuals and families who have been staggered by the prolonged recession and whose worries are quite high. More than 170,000 people have lost their jobs since early 2001. Their mortgages are at risk, their college tuition plans are up in smoke, their car payments are one step ahead of the repo man, their credit cards are maxed out, and their investments, if any, have been depleted during the long course of this recession.

There is no question about their skills, their work ethic, or their proven abilities. Indeed, these individuals and their families were an important part of our workforce during those heady days of the mid and late 1990s. We should therefore, do everything in our power to stimulate the creation of jobs so that they might once again return to productive pursuits and an improved quality of life.

As part of our effort to stimulate job growth we listened closely to the hopes and fears of many of these talented but jobless citizens. We listened to business leaders and to their associations and chambers of commerce regarding their challenges and opportunities. We

consulted with academic leaders and economists as to courses of action which we might pursue in order to position Massachusetts for an ever increasing share of any economic recovery.

After all that preparatory effort the legislature passed an unprecedented job creation bill. The bill recapitalizes some of our most successful economic development entities and provides a job creation framework and focus for every single region of the state. We can no longer be content with the bulk of economic activity and opportunity occurring in and around greater Boston. Certainly the capital city is enormously important to both the state and to New England. Yet it is also true that other regions of our state must share in the bounty of a growing economic pie.

After such a concentration of effort, it was with considerable dismay that we watched the Governor veto sizeable chunks of this jobs creation program. If we are to be serious about our economic circumstances and if we are determined to cultivate and create as many jobs as possible for the people of Massachusetts, then it will be with respectful disagreement that we override some of the Governor's vetoes next week. People's lives and their livelihoods are too important to let the Governor's vetoes stand.

The planned overrides of the Governor's vetoes are quite consistent with our actions of 2003. Many of you will recall the dismay we felt when the Governor vetoed funds for the advanced manufacturing technology center in Fall River. Our dismay was driven by the thoughtful history behind this job creation project. Our dismay was further heightened by our specific knowledge that a Massachusetts based research company, Avant Immunotherapeutics of Needham, lead by Dr. Una Ryan, had made a breakthrough discovery for protecting people against the terrorist threat of anthrax.

Our pride in the research and development skills of our gifted citizens, and our hope that the quest for life sciences, health care breakthroughs and other emerging technologies would help move Massachusetts forward were dashed by Governor Romney's veto and his message.

The potential jobs associated with this enterprise were too important to lose to another state without a serious effort. We therefore took up the Governor's veto and overrode it. I am happy to report to you today that the company will soon be operating out of the manufacturing center in Fall River, that there will be from 15 to as many as 200 people gainfully employed, and that we have conveyed a strong sense of purpose and urgency to all entrepreneurs regarding economic opportunity and jobs.

Our work in this task of job creation will not end with next week's overrides of the Governor's vetoes. Indeed, our concentration and effort on this all-important task cannot be allowed to backslide or to rest in any way. Therefore, we will continue to defend successful economic development policies from attack as well as to search out every significant opportunity for job creation and economic security.

Closely associated with a paramount policy of jobs, jobs, jobs must be continued emphasis on education.

If an abundance of jobs is seen as a crucial ingredient to our quality of life, then a similar abundance of education must be seen as crucial to attracting and keeping those jobs.

One specific facet of education beckons our interest and complements the substantial educational gains we have made since 1993.

I believe that this year we should build upon our recent efforts to expand early childhood education.

The legislature has initiated full day kindergarten offerings as well as early literacy, reach out and read, and parent/child home reading programs.

Compelling research supports these initiatives of ours. We should therefore, systematically and comprehensively build upon those initiatives.

By the year 2010, we can be well advanced in an early childhood education policy that matches in scope and ambition the effort which we made in 1993 on education reform.

The dividends we will secure for our children and for our future are enormous.

Early literacy and numeracy will quickly become cornerstones for serious academic advances. Our students can gain fluency in the crucial disciplines of math and science. Substantial declines in special education referrals should also be achieved. The children of Massachusetts will more frequently pursue advanced placement courses and will more frequently gain admission and success at the finest colleges and universities across the land.

Such beneficial opportunities cannot be secured overnight, particularly in light of our present economic and fiscal realities.

Yet the preparation should move forward. The commitment should be made.

The stakes are very high. Your embrace of this proposal will inevitably mean that other areas of our budget will receive somewhat lesser shrift. On behalf of the taxpayers of Massachusetts we should not shy away from that reality. On behalf of the taxpayers of Massachusetts our choices must always acknowledge inadequate resources for every claim which is pressed upon us. I believe that this choice is the right choice for our future and I ask you to join me in the effort to advance it.

A third issue cries out for thoughtful action as soon as possible. The issue of housing, specifically the production of several thousand apartments and homes, has become an economic imperative for Massachusetts.

The costs associated with housing in our state are an impossible burden for every segment of our society. An impressive number of business leaders now identify the need for greater production of housing as their number one priority for future economic growth.

In this area, I commend the Senate President and the Governor for their diligence and their determination. There appears to be universal recognition of the mismatch between the supply and the demand for housing.

Policies which stimulate the production of housing must be developed as quickly as possible and those policies must be sustained for the foreseeable future. Success in this area of public policy will be immensely helpful to our economic and social future. Failure would be such a setback to our efforts in the educational and economic areas that it should not be contemplated.

The spectacle of our own children being priced out of their own neighborhoods and the prospect of a long continuation of that trend is neither healthy nor wise for Massachusetts.

The Governor as well as our housing committee chairs and members have some worthwhile ideas for addressing the housing shortage of Massachusetts.

This should be an area where bi-partisan effort brings out good policy and good results for our people.

Therefore, I publicly and enthusiastically pledge to work with the Governor and the Senate President on this issue in the months ahead. A cooperative and energetic partnership can pay great dividends for our state.

A fourth goal will be the production and passage of a transparent, balanced, and timely budget. There will be no excuses and no delays, no games, no gimmicks, no smoke and no mirrors. You did it last year and we will do it again and again.

Finally, a word about the surface artery parcels associated with the looming completion of the big dig.

As sections of the old elevated highway are being taken down, the wonderful possibilities for future generations are being put at risk by turf battles for jurisdiction and control of those parcels. The state interest in these parcels is crystal clear: the state paid substantial sums for the land in question; the state has paid for and will pay for a significant share of the costs of clearance and construction; the state has entered environmental mitigation agreements regarding the protection of open space; and there is strong citizen interest to have these parcels speak to the world in striking and fashion about this fair city and state, in the same way that the Zakim Bunker Hill bridge now speaks in striking and memorable fashion.

As strong as those state interests may be however, they cannot be allowed to trample upon the concerns of the city or upon the neighborhoods which have borne the brunt of the burdens of this project.

I therefore propose for your consideration the creation of a public trust for the permanent protection and improvement of these special public places. While the details of this proposal can be decided over several weeks, we should not lose this opportunity to secure the jewels of our future.

I now share with you a closing thought about that baby girl who has been born during these remarks, the baby's parents, and about us. It is a sobering thought and it is this:

Our decisions will, for better or worse, affect that baby, her parents, and her peers. It is for them that we must continue to get these big decisions right.

For years now I have been drawn to the poem *Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard* and to those poignant lines:

*Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.*

*But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.*

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*

Those lines evoke the tragedy of lives, rich with potential, but stricken by a drought of education and of opportunity. Let that not be the epitaph of that little girl born today. Instead, let us take those steps which will write epitaphs of lives well and fully lived.

Early last summer I sat with the Governor in his office and reviewed with him the most recent MCAS results and the first in the nation standing of our students. The Governor was pleased and proud of their continued progress and he indicated to me that he was calling a press conference to share the good news. I understood the Governor's pride and his desire to boast a little bit about this state of ours. I share the same pleasure in the results, the same pride in the progress, and a desire to brag a little bit on your behalf.

As, I walked back to my office, I thought about those lives which we are improving and I murmured a quiet thank you to the individuals who had brought us to this point of achievement;

Tom Birmingham, William Bulger, Paul Cellucci, Charles Flaherty, Fran Marini, Mark Roosevelt, Jane Swift, Bill Weld, and many others, including all of you.

They were men and women of Beacon Hill, of the Statehouse, and yes of politics. They were also leaders with vision, with strength, and with character. They brought forth reforms and they brought forth results. They were not going to be content with mournful epitaphs for the children and people of Massachusetts. Let us then continue their work and carry their dream forward. Let us do it cheerfully and cooperatively, knowing that an innocent little girl and her frightened but hopeful parents await our judgments.

Thank You.